

# Hillandale



Journal of the  
City of London  
Phonograph and  
Gramophone Society

THE HILLANDALE NEWS

June 1987 No. 156

ISSN-0018-1846



The Old Palace at Hatfield, and a  
late arrival for the CLPGS Symposium

# The HILLANDALE NEWS

The Official Journal of The City of London Phonograph & Gramophone Society

EDITOR: Peter Martland,  
DISTRIBUTION: David R. Roberts,

JUNE 1987

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## CITY OF LONDON PHONOGRAPH & GRAMOPHONE SOCIETY (founded 1919)

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## **EDITORIAL**

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ONE of the principle delights of being a member of our Society is to be found in the pages of our journal. The pleasure and interest gained by reading "The Hillandale News" is frequently alluded to in its letter column, and I am conscious that for the bulk of our members it is the only point of contact with the Society.

When I agreed to take on the task of Editor I was very conscious of two things. Firstly, how could I possibly step into the shoes, and maintain the standards of my two illustrious predecessors, Christopher Proudfoot and the late Bill Brott ? The second thought I had was more selfish. I realised that I would no longer have the pleasure of opening the familiar envelope to discover what goodies Christopher had put together: now I will know what is in the "Hillandale News" before it arrives. I will have to find some other occupation whilst I eat my cornflakes on the day the postman delivers it!

On a more serious note, I would like to thank Christopher for the fine job he did over so many years. As editor, copyist and typist his has been an unenviable task. However, it has been undertaken with the quiet confidence we have all expected of him. I hope (and know) that he will remain a contributor to the journal and continue to share with us his unrivalled knowledge of our hobby.

Peter Martland

## **From the Chair**

---

THIS edition of "The Hillandale News" is a rather special one, being the first to come from the hands of its new Editor, Peter Martland. It is thus a milestone in the magazine's history since it marks the end of Christopher Proudfoot's tenure of the Editorial Chair, and allows him at last to set down a burden he has carried alone for eight years.

Christopher took over the "Hillandale" at the beginning of 1979, shortly before the death of the previous editor, Bill Brott. Bill was professionally involved in publishing, and had brought the magazine to a markedly high quality, one not easy for any amateur to match. Far from flinching at this challenge, Chris maintained the standard from the first, and some would say he went on to surpass it. The earliest magazines to spring from his editorship included that of April 1979, a special bumper issue of forty-four pages celebrating the Society's Diamond Jubilee. By December, four issues later, he was not only editing the magazine but creating it, singlehanded, typing every word, setting all the page-headings, laying out the illustrations, all unaided, so that the finished sheets could be printed without any further processing. By this means he saved your Society some hundreds of pounds in printing costs during the first year alone, and he has gone on doing the same until now.

Unfortunately for us, Christopher's other commitments have increased over

the years, including those pertaining to the small matter of earning a living for his family (which has also increased over the years, I am delighted to report). They put upon his shoulders a workload which would have felled a lesser man (the commitments, I mean, not the family) and he might well have handed in his notice. As it was he laboured on despite the pressure, merely making frantic signals that we should find someone else to be our magazine editor. By rights we should have let him off the hook two years ago, but he was too good to lose. Instead we accepted a delay of a month or more on each publication date as the price of retaining his expert services. This has proved unfair to our advertisers, who saw their notices appear late time after time, and I hope they will accept my apologies.

It was also unfair to ourselves, since all the time we had an excellent editor standing by all ready to leap into the breach, in the person of our Vice Chairman, Peter Martland. Now, Peter may be clever, but he can't work a typewriter, and by now Christopher had established the precedent that a "Hillandale" editor must not only be conversant with the Queen's English and with talking machines, but additionally must be an expert type-setter, graphic designer, and layout man. It took us a little time to hit upon a solution to this conundrum, which is that Peter will edit the magazine with a little help from his typing friends.

And so, my sincere thanks and good wishes to our retiring editor, Christopher Proudfoot, whose name, whether he likes it or not, will loom large in the annals of our hobby as viewed by the researchers and collectors of the future, and who now stands down just in time to retain his sanity. I am glad to say that his association with this magazine will continue: he will go on providing illustrations from his apparently inexhaustible supply, and I share his expressed hope that he will now find time to write articles for us. And to fill his place I give my warmest welcome to our new editor, Peter Martland, whose fitness for the task you may judge for yourselves as you peruse these pages.

For the future our intentions are twofold: firstly that from August onwards all editions of "The Hillandale News" should reach its readers during the month in which it is scheduled for publication; secondly that the magazine should not decline from the high standard for which it has rightly become noted.

This is where you, the members of our Society, come in. The problem which most haunted the retiring editor will continue to harass the new one. It is the problem of where the material comes from. Christopher Proudfoot has pointed out many times that it comes from YOU. The editor doesn't write the magazine; he merely cobbles it together from what is contributed by the readers. So, come on readers, give Peter something to edit. And keep it coming, please.

Ted Cunningham

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# The First Ten-Inch Records

by Ruth Edge and Leonard Petts

Edited from a talk presented to  
The City of London Phonograph and Gramophone Society  
at the Bloomsbury Institute on 25th February 1986

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## PART 1

During the Autumn of 1899 and the Spring of 1900, Eldridge Johnson was at work in Camden, New Jersey, perfecting his new process of wax recording, for which The Gramophone Company Ltd. had purchased the British and European rights in February 1899. At the same time he was experimenting with a larger record, one of 10" diameter, and by April 1900 work was well advanced: he had, in fact, promised London that they would have delivery in March of sample ten-inch records, and a gramophone to play them on, but work had fallen some six weeks behind.

Johnson was looking for ways of improving the style and presentation of the record information on these new Victor records, although at this time there was no suggestion of using a paper label. He wrote to Barry Owen, the Managing Director of the Gramophone Company Ltd., on 23rd April 1900:

"Strange to say, one of our greatest difficulties has been the proper marking of these records. We never tried before to mark them properly, as if we were making them to sell. We have been content to scratch the title and number with a scriber. We had intended to stamp them with a hot die, but I think a few trials will convince anyone that it is uncertain in results, and very likely to spoil the record. Cold pressure is quite as unsatisfactory.

Stencilling gives a beautiful effect by pounding through the stencil with a dry brush, but we cannot make the stencil fast enough without building a special machine. We have decided to stick to the hot die, and are making a special fixture so that ordinary type can be used, and rapidly. We find the amount of heat to be of great importance."

Development problems continued to plague Johnson. In a footnote to a letter of 5th June he said:

"We are working very hard to push out the new machine and the ten-inch records. We are making a big advance in the recording process, but there is something just ahead of us which we have been unable to reach so far."

We find no further reference to the development of the ten-inch record until the appearance of a news-sheet from Messrs. Hawthorn and Sheble of New York City, advertising the new records. It is undated; possibly late December 1900 but more likely January 1901. (See facing page.)

On 7th January Johnson cabled London: "Ten-inch records a great success: do you want outfit ?" to which Owen replied by letter on 12th January:

"We cabled you yesterday 'send outfit quick' which means we would like to have the recorder for the making of the ten-inch records, and especially is this true if it involves a recording machine which regulates, or is built on any principle which runs better than the one we have at present."

The reference to a recording machine which regulates reflects Owen's current concern that their new records were not perfect owing to the fluctuations of speed by the recording machine.

"I am convinced that we are very far indeed from having a machine which regulates perfectly. This makes more difference than anything else can to the absolute quality of the record. We are inclined to think here that it is not difficult at all to make a thoroughly good record as far as the sound recorder goes or as far as the initial making of the sound wave, but the whole difficulty is in not being able to get a record which is absolutely pure and unaffected by the speed of the machine as it is being recorded."

Johnson replied on February 24th:

"I received your cable ordering a ten-inch outfit and have started to build the same for you. As to the matter of regulation all I can say is, the machine we are using runs regular. We have adopted an entirely new principle in the matter of controlling this recording machine, and it seems to work perfectly. We use no governor, as I have discovered after considerable experimenting that the governor which controls the recording machine is not a practical thing."

Not unnaturally, Johnson takes Owen to task over his statement that it was easy to make a thoroughly good record:

"I disagree with you absolutely when you state that you are inclined to think it is not difficult to make a thorough good record, as far as the sound recorder goes, and I don't agree with you that the whole difficulty is not being able to get a recording machine run true. My experience has been that the recording machine purely a mechanical matter, and while it requires care and skill, it cannot be classed with the difficult things to get one to run accurately. On the other hand I have found the condition of the recording material, the point and the diaphragm, to be decidedly difficult to handle, so difficult indeed that we have grown to avoid looking out for cross-eyed people, making records on Fridays, and walking under ladders. Don't let anybody tell you that your recording machines such as we build for you don't make a good record if the other conditions are correct. The whole story

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**Regular 7-inch Record**  
**50c. each, \$5.00 per doz.**

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**Monarch 10-inch Record**  
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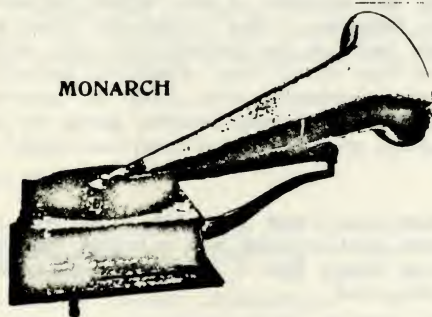
**Enormous Volume      Perfect Quality      Marvelous Results**

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**The Monarch** is especially designed for the ten (10) inch record, having a much stronger motor than the small machine. *It is really two machines in one, reproducing both the large and small Records.* All working parts are encased in a handsome, highly polished oak cabinet, no unsightly or greasy mechanism exposed. Includes a 21 inch burnished brass horn.

**PRICE, \$40.00**

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is that we are making records too loud for the surface speed of the seven-inch record, and it is only when we get a combination with conditions particularly favourable that we get good results." Johnson concluded the letter with the news: "We sent out a few sample ten-inch records last week and the orders are piling up fast. There is no question about it - we have got everybody beat."

Owen, in his reply, expressed some very surprising views on the introduction of the ten-inch record:

"You cannot possibly imagine how intense I am in my desire to postpone this ten-inch disc as long as possible. I send you a copy of a letter which I received today from Mr. Joseph Berliner, and it will give you some idea of the reason why I am so loath to have this done. He is producing from 9,000 to 10,000 records a day, and by reason of the fact that orders are piling up ahead of him amounting to nearly 200,000 records he is putting in ten more presses, making 40 in all, so as to make up the capacity of the factory to about 14,000 discs a day. This, if you will kindly think of it, means an immense product, and if the ten-inch record is to very seriously affect this business it will throw a burden and onus upon us which is something enormous."

Sometime around the end of August 1900 Johnson had begun to use the paper label on his seven-inch records, replacing the somewhat unsatisfactory method of impressing the trademark, title, and artist information into the centre of the record itself. With the introduction of the ten-inch record Johnson had continued the practice, placing on these records a label of black paper with gold printing, known as "gold" labels. Owen congratulated Johnson upon this.

"Our records do not look as well, and we cannot compliment you too highly on the splendid appearance of your gold label records. I am thinking seriously of adopting it. There are two points, however. One is the fact that we have so much material which we turn back to the factory for using over, and with the paper which would be on the record they would be perfectly useless. Our catalogue is so large, too, numbering over 5,000 at present, that this would be a very serious question of having printing going on all the time for this enormous number and I am afraid it would delay our work."

On 1st March 1901 Johnson wrote reassuring Owen that the paper was no problem as far as recycling went, and stating that printing was a bother but one which was surmountable. He warned Owen to ensure that if he adopted the paper label he should use only the same paper as they had:

"If you try this work, let me caution you to use the same kind of paper you will find on our labels. We had quite a bit of trouble getting the thing right."

On the introduction of the ten-inch record and the new gramophone to play it, Johnson remarked:

The ten-inch recording took me the best part of a year to straighten out. I am just at the present time finishing up a new-style soundbox for concert work; also a new model side-wind gramophone. I have a ten-inch machine that is giving pretty good satisfaction. We are making about 300 of them by hand: I shall send you one."

He followed this with a further message on 12th March 1901:

"I have not yet heard what you think of the ten-inch records. We find they are a decided success here. They are giving us a standing we have never had before. We are sending you by express a sample of the ten-inch gramophone which we are selling in large numbers on this side. We are making them practically by hand at present. We sell them at \$40 each and cannot begin to supply the demand."

(To be concluded)

*An article entitled "THE 10" BERLINER RECORDS", also extracted from this same lecture by Ruth Edge and Leonard Petts, will be found in "The Hillandale News" of August 1986*

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## Correspondence

Stevenage, Herts.

Dear Sir,

I would like to thank through the journal the whole Committee, and in particular our Chairman, Ted Cunningham, for a superb day at Hatfield '87. Dare I ask, is there going to be another one next year ?

Yours sincerely,  
Aubrey Smith

-----0-----

Didcot, Oxon

Dear Sir,

My wife and I would like to say how much we enjoyed "Hatfield '87". The speakers were all outstanding in their respective fields, and we both learned a lot of new information. We would also like to comment on the excellent meal and on the friendly atmosphere. We would very much like to see a repeat of this event on a yearly basis, perhaps held at the same venue, as it has easy access from most areas in the country.

Yours sincerely,  
J. Robert Dever

*Ted Cunningham writes: I am delighted that so many members have echoed these views in speaking to me. I would love to see this as an annual event, but owing to the work involved I think we might make it perhaps every two years. Let's see whether they'll have us back again at Hatfield Old Palace!*

Dear Sir,

Rodmell, Nr. Lewes

The letter from George Frow about Regal-Zonophone issues and deletions in the February "Hillandale News" was most helpful. Unhappily I do not now have any 12" Regal-Zonophone records, although at the time the 1940/41 deletions were made I acquired MX13, a recording by Clarence Raybould and the Classic Symphony Orchestra of the "Peer Gynt" Suite. The record had the original red and green Regal-Zonophone label and, although memory can play one false after almost half a century, was enclosed in a scaled-up version of the standard Regal-Zonophone envelope. At nineteen years of age I felt rather indignant that though Anitra and the Trolls were allowed their dances in full on side two, side one contained only a brief "Morning", and Ase went to her death in a rather perfunctory manner. I recklessly passed the record to a less pompously demanding owner.

Several other deleted 10" Regal Zonophones were bought from Marks and Spencers at this time, some with red and green labels, some bearing the later plain red livery. Amongst those now lost to me were the Classic Symphony Orchestra in "Pagliacci" (quite dreadful) and the Classic Opera Company in "Il Trovatore" singing risible English. Still with me though, is a "Barber of Seville" Overture by the National Symphony Orchestra which, despite two small and quite unnecessary cuts, sounds quite lively even by present-day standards.

The only 'Celebrity' records I have stem from the old Zonophone catalogue and came from a second-hand lot. They bear the bright red labels of the traditional Zonophone pattern. Amazing inclusions in the 1940/1 catalogue are two records by L'Incognita. I have a single-sided Zonophone Grand Opera record of this singer in "Ah fors e lui," a recording which was, presumably, of the same vintage as those being offered for sale in 1941 without any clue to their age.

Not all of the 12" items would have been poor value at 4/- plus PT. I have with their original Zonophone and Regal labels, the "Orpheus in Hades" Overture (National Symphony Orchestra) and an "HMS Pinafore" selection (BBC Symphony Orchestra) which are not at all bad. The drastic pruning which went on during the early years of the war might, to advantage, have been more selective. We have never, for instance, had another recording of the suite "La Cimarosiana."

Yours sincerely,

Alan Sheppard

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Dear Sir,

I have been sent a small number of forms inviting membership of the friends of the Edison National Historic Site in New Jersey, USA. This runs from \$10 a year for student/senior citizens, \$15 ordinary member, \$25 for a family, and so on. Members receive a Newsletter, lapel badge, certificate, and there are other advantages. Should any member of this Society like to be associated with the Edison Laboratory in this way I would be happy to send him or her one of these forms.

George L. Frow

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# Obituary

ROLAND GELATT

The death of Roland Gelatt last December at the age of 66 seems to have gone unremarked in phonograph and gramophone circles except in "The New Amberola Graphic."

Gelatt was the first writer to attempt a full exploration of the history of the Talking Machine in "The Fabulous Phonograph," first published in 1955 and updated in 1965, and again in 1977 for the Phonograph Centenary. It was the first book to give any worthwhile guidance to those who were turning to interest themselves in the hobby at that time. The first British edition was in 1956.

Until then many writers had compiled technical manuals on talking machines, then there had been books like "The Romance of the Gramophone" (1927) by T. Lindsay Buick; "Talking Machines" (early 1920s) by Ogilvie Mitchell; and "Talking Wax" (1945) by Leroy Hughbanks, but none had really attempted to unravel the legal wrangles, puzzles and relationships of Berliner, Johnson, Zonophone, Pathé, A.I.C.C., Neophone, Victor, Graphophone, and Edison, and many others. This Gelatt proceeded to do with what was reasonably available from the talking machine journals since the early days, and although time has obviously shown up some errors and omissions, Gelatt built a sturdy plinth from which others have taken off and diversified.

But Roland Gelatt was a journalist first and a talking machine historian by inclination. He joined "Musical Digest" as associate editor, becoming features editor of "The Saturday Review" in 1948. In 1954 he was appointed editor of "High Fidelity" and became editor-in-chief. He lived in London for a time on the board of a publishing house, and outside his editorial work published many articles on travel, opera, theatre, and the arts.

I never met him, but recall about 20 years ago being approached by a Black-pool musician who was promoting a gathering of collectors at the Norbreck Hydro Hotel, to be addressed by Roland Gelatt, with machines from my collection to illustrate the talk. Nothing came of this, unfortunately perhaps, as it would have been rewarding to met the man who clarified and classified so much for us in the mid-1950s.

George Frow

# HATFIELD '87

A Report on the CLPGS Symposium  
by KEN LOUGHLAND

IT WAS a beautiful sunny morning on Sunday 26th April when the Committee members loaded their cars with machines, sound equipment, publications, wives and friends, and set out for Hatfield Old Palace in Hertfordshire, to arrive by nine o'clock. The next hour was one of concentrated activity as the platform and the display tables in the stately hall were set up. The splendid Quad amplification equipment and electrostatic loudspeakers, over £1,200-worth, brand new and generously supplied on loan by the manufacturers, were connected up and tested. In another part of the great hall an impressive selection of publications from the CLPGS Bookshelf was being arranged to tempt the visitors who at that moment were converging on Hatfield, and a display of machines, cylinder and disc, soon added a decorative touch to the already impressive setting.

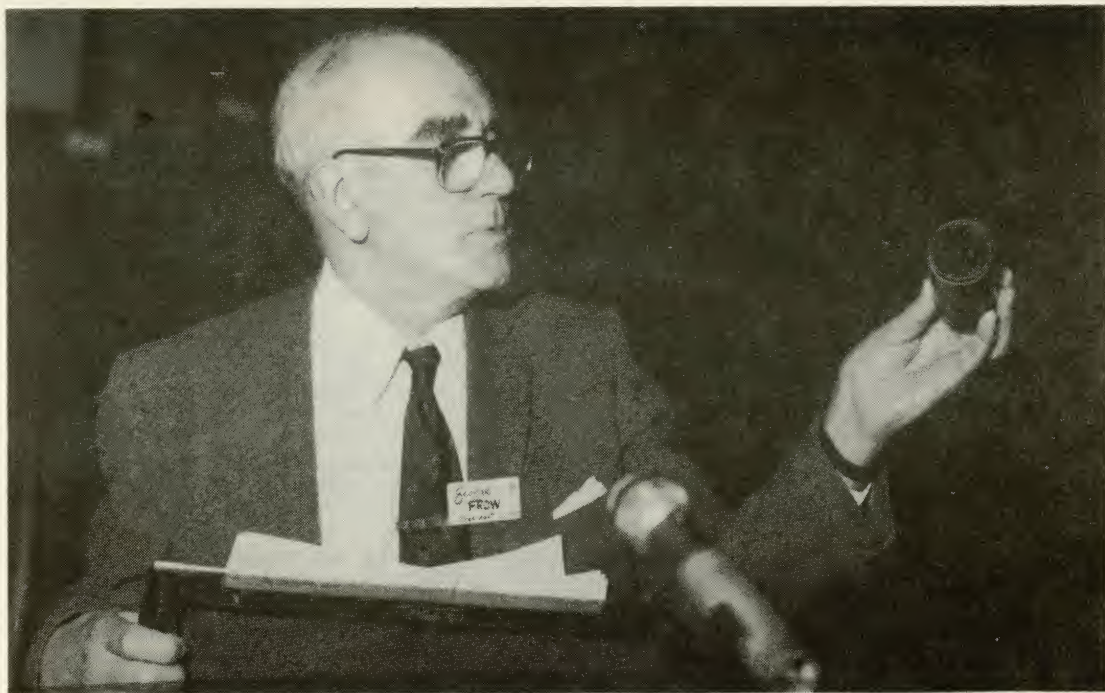
The visitors began to arrive and were directed to the reception desk, to coffee, and to the process of making new acquaintances and renewing old ones. The friendly crowd grew in number (at mid-day exactly 100 people sat down to lunch). Eventually all took their seats; the Chairman welcomed them to Hatfield '87, and went on to welcome the first of the four speakers of the day.

## George Frow

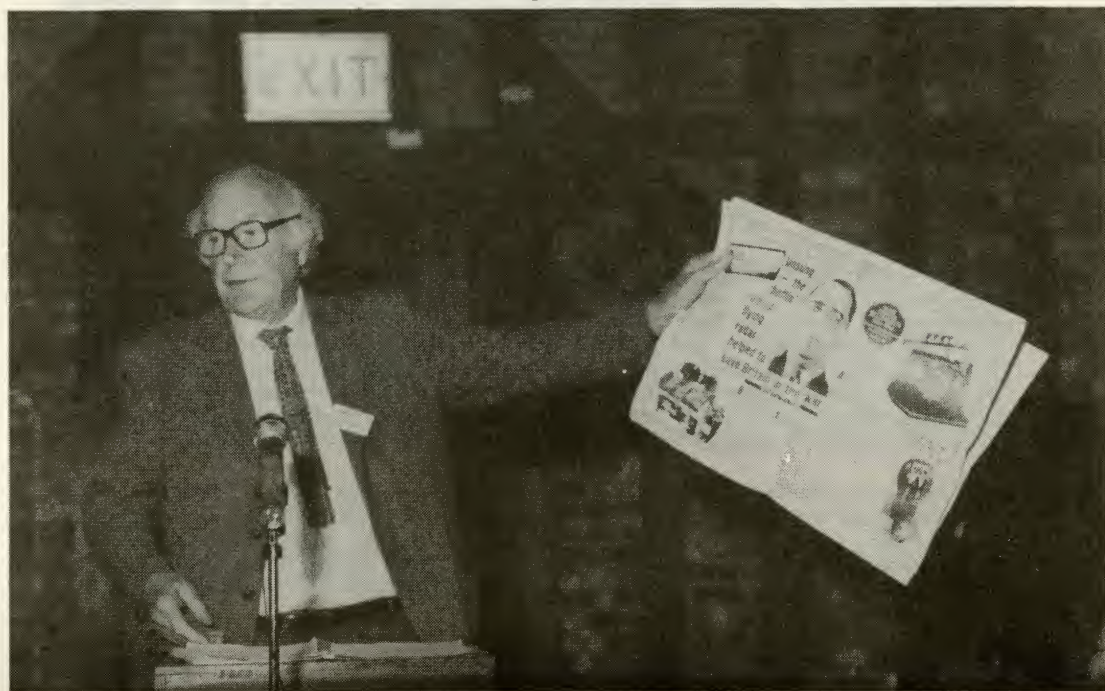
Our President, George Frow, presented a talk entitled "The Centenary of the Phonograph Cylinder." He showed and demonstrated a variety of types and makes of phonograph cylinders which had progressively been introduced during the period of the phonograph's commercial use, from the late 1870s to the late 1920s. Of particular interest was the history of the cylinder moulding and replicating process, and information concerning the materials used at different stages of the cylinder's development, from brown wax to celluloid. The talk included a summary of cylinder periods of manufacture, sizes and playing speeds, which was a model of concise information.

Several cylinders of different types were played on an Edison 'Idelia' phonograph, starting with a lively Blue Amberol of 1914 by the coon shouter Stella Mayhew and ending with a 1913 recording, also a Blue Amberol, of Florencio Constantino singing "Celeste Aida." This gave far more pleasing sound quality than an electrically-recorded Edison cylinder we heard, from the late 1920s. We heard a recording made by Joe Pengelly from a Lioret cylinder of 1897: it was a French humorous song and revealed good recording quality combined with beefy volume. Then there was a laughing song performed by George Johnson, to much the same tune as was later to be used repeatedly by Charles Penrose. This recording took on a rather creepy quality when one heard that Johnson was eventually hanged for the murder of his wife.

Our President's talk was a first-class opener to the Symposium and was enthusiastically received. George concluded by paying tribute to the scholarship of Frank Andrews, who had provided a good deal of source material.



George Frow



Laurence Stapley

### Laurence Stapley

Next came Laurence Stapley, who is a member of the Advisory Committee of the National Sound Archive. He told us that when he left the B.B.C. he decided to compile an aural history of the recording industry. He started the project 2½ years ago, and has now produced about 100 interview tapes, each of up to two hours duration. Most of the subjects are involved in classical music, reflecting Mr. Stapley's own inclinations, but Humphrey Lyttelton and Dame Vera Lynn, eminent in the jazz and popular fields respectively, are featured. Three leading classical musicians were heard speaking about their work: Sir David Willcox, recorded when Director of the Royal College of Music, described making records with the choristers of King's College, Cambridge; Sir Neville Marriner, a most prolific maker of records, talked about the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields; and Sir Yehudi Menuhin spoke of his collaboration with Sir Edward Elgar when he, Menuhin, was sixteen. These interviews revealed a great deal about the subjects and their art. Musical extracts accompanied them: respectively, Allegri's *Miserere* (King's); a Rossini string sonata (Academy); and the Elgar Violin Concerto (Menuhin).

Laurence Stapley's next subject, Adrian Farmer of the pioneering recording company Nimbus, explained the philosophy his company applied to the recording of performances. The Nimbus technique for securing the best performance differed from that of other companies. In simple terms it consisted of not stopping too often for mistakes in performance, but carrying on with the music-making. Any necessary editing could be done later from, perhaps, two complete performances recorded onto the master tapes, and this would result in a finished record of greater musical integrity than one made up from a large number of one-bar or one-note corrections, obtained from a collection of incomplete performances. The fine work of Nimbus was exemplified by some Chopin from Shura Cherkasky.

In another interview Sir David Attenborough let us into some of the secrets of recording wild animals, particularly in the earlier days of making nature programmes. Mr. Stapley's final excerpt came from an interview with the widow of the gifted inventor, Alan Blumlein, who worked on stereo recording well over fifty years ago. He also worked on 405-line electronically-scanned television in the 1930s with Isaac Schoenberg, who himself said Blumlein deserved much of the credit for bringing that system to its high degree of efficiency. Blumlein also worked on radar for Britain's defence, and our picture shows Mr. Stapley displaying a newspaper feature on this unsung 'boffin.' Blumlein was killed in a flying accident during this work in 1941. His widow, interviewed by Stapley, recorded some fascinating anecdotes about her brilliant and kindly husband. To illustrate this interview we heard an early stereo demonstration, recorded at Abbey Road about 1932, in which Blumlein and his colleagues pace the studio floor in different directions while he comments for the two microphones.

Laurence Stapley's excellent talk took us to lunch time. After a pause for immediate refreshment in the well-patronised bar, and further social mingling, we and our wives and friends (some of us with litres of decent, middle-of-the-road house wine) made our way to the dining tables in the Great Hall, to enjoy a roast chicken lunch, with suitable soup and dessert fore and aft, so to speak.

### Robert Parker

We reassembled for the afternoon session of the Symposium to hear the Australian expert on digital reprocessing of early recordings, Robert Parker. Mr. Parker described himself as basically a record collector, having grown up in a house filled with gramophones, all of the electrically-amplified variety. He told us that his father, a radio engineer, brought home from England in 1928 a Brunswick Panatrope reproducer, which led to the acquisition of other electric machines in the Parker household.

Robert Parker has provided "The Hillandale News" with his own article expounding the main points which made his talk so interesting; the question of how archaic records are supposed to sound; the difficulties of analysing their shortcomings, the impossibility of establishing a standard of reference; and his basic reasons for wanting to attempt the recreation of vintage recordings. All of these matters are covered in Mr. Parker's own words on another page, and so they need not be duplicated here, but much of the interest for his attentive listeners lay in the musical illustrations with which he demonstrated his thesis.

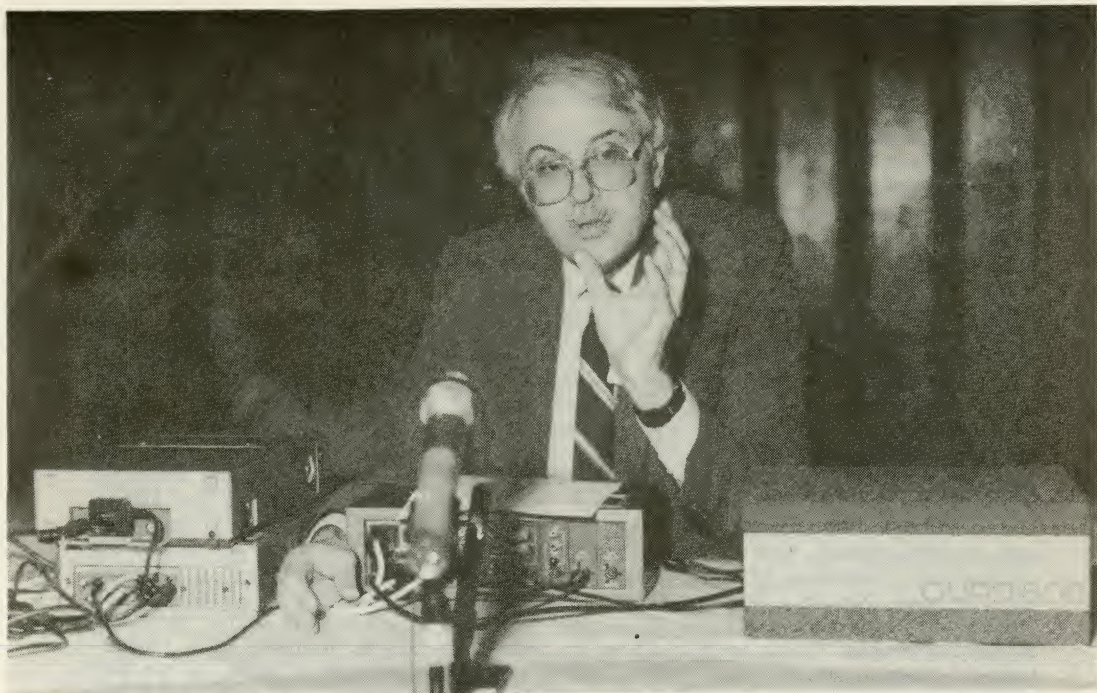
For example, he played contrasting versions of a Bessie Smith blues recording, one a CBS reissue, the other a Parker reprocessing. They made a fascinating comparison. Contrary to a strongly expressed article in "Hi-Fi News" some time ago by Ken Kessler, your reporter considered the Parker re-processed version clearly the more pleasurable to listen to. Next we heard a 1907 Victor recording of Caruso singing "Vesti la giubba" in its unprocessed form, followed by a Parker-treated example of the same take. Gone were the defects of what, in its original form, was never Caruso's most satisfactory recording, yet nothing of the music had been sacrificed. It was like hearing the great tenor sing the aria in his real voice for the first time.

We then listened to examples of original and simply-filtered versions of Patti's "Voi che sapete." There was a comparison between the original version and several Parker-processed versions, (one with some added surface noise from a blind-cut disc) and this provided a most absorbing contrast. It all served to confirm this reporter in his approval of the Parker technique: others may agree or disagree, and it would not be surprising if some opinions on the matter should duly appear among the letters to the Editor of this magazine.

Finally Robert Parker played three versions of a 1933 Joe Venuti recording, "Vibraphonia" (in which Venuti with his \$25 violin was joined by others, notably Adrian Rollini on vibraphone); they were the original recording, an L.P. reissue, and his own re-processed version. Reasonable as the original recording was, the re-processed version added to the musical worth, gave a desirable separation to the instruments, and made the listener feel that the session in the studio could not possibly have been held fifty-four years ago. Mr. Parker's most absorbing lecture was followed by much lively and interesting questioning from the audience.

### Peter Adamson

Our final speaker was Peter Adamson. An authority on Berliner discs, he took us through a fascinating selection of these pioneer lateral records. First



Robert Parker



Peter Adamson

we heard a short recital of five-inch Berliners, including "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" (surely the flat disc equivalent of "Mary had a little lamb"), a piano solo of a piece called "Bocaccio"; the old Scots air "The Bluebell(s) of Scotland", and an instrumental quintet playing a version of Brahms' Hungarian Dance No.6. This last record showed obvious signs of speed variation, which could well have been due to hand-cranking of the recording turntable.

Soon these five-inch records were to give way to seven-inch discs, pressed in vulcanite, with a few exceptions where celluloid was used. The seven-inchers had a groove pitch of 100 to the inch and ran at around 70 rpm, to give a playing time of two minutes. Selections were largely of band music, instrumental quartets, baritone solos, clarinet and cornet solos, and recitations. Peter Adamson played a disc entitled "The Spirit of '76", a mixture of patriotic calls with a drum rendering of "Yankee Doodle", and described in the catalogue as 'very dramatic.' There followed an example of 'Indian' (i.e., American Indian) music, and then a male-voice quartet billed as 'The Diamond Four' giving us "Massa's in de cold, cold ground" with voiced simulation of the plucking of banjos. Typical of the 'recitation' record of the time was a solemn and sonorous rendering of Psalm 23 by an unidentified speaker, possibly Len Spencer or the Reverend de Witt Talmadge of the Tin Tabernacle in New York City.

The Berliner operations in America having become a success, there was a spread of the Company's activities to Europe to attract the cream of European musical talent. William Barry Owen, sent to London to set up the British recording operation with Trevor Williams, established a studio at 31 Maiden Lane to make recordings for processing in Germany. We heard an example of the output from this period: the Queen of the Night's aria from "The Magic Flute" sung by Ellen Beach Yaw. At this time the Berliner discs were pressed from a rather hairy composition, which added to the already high content of surface noise.

By 1898/99 it was clear that the gramophone was a success. Fred Gaisberg and Sinkler Darby visited various major European centres with their recording apparatus to capture the voices of famous Continental singers. They then toured Glasgow, Cardiff, and other cities, finishing in London, but Gaisberg was not impressed with the standard of musical performance he encountered in Britain. Nevertheless several recordings were made, including Jessie MacLauchlan in the Gaelic version of "Ho, Ro, my Nut Brown Maiden," and James Scott Skinner, the talented Scots fiddler, in "The Perthshire Hunt," both of which Peter played to us. He then took us to the change from zinc-etched recordings to those of the wax variety, showing clear benefits in the quality of the recorded sound.

Peter made generous use of slides to illustrate his lecture, even though Berliners, with their all-black centres, are not the easiest things to photograph and show on a screen. He closed an absorbing and informative programme by playing a recording of Emile Berliner himself singing "Auld Lang Syne" - a fitting example from his collection with which to remind us that 1987 is the centenary year of the Berliner patents.

Hatfield '87 was a great success, and the Officers and Committee who organised the Symposium are grateful to all the members and visiting speakers who helped to make it so.

MISS FERGUSON.  
DR. FURNIVAL

COLONEL GOURAUD.

REV. JOHN PENFOLK.

REV. H. R. HAWELS.  
MRS. HAWELS.

### A Voice from the Dead.

The above group represents a notable moment in the history of science and literature. The voice of the poet Browning, preserved by the phonograph, was being heard after death. It was the first occasion on which science had reproduced the actual voice of a dead man. "Every word," says Colonel Gouraud, "was perfectly distinct and of life-like fidelity."

### THE "REVIEW OF REVIEWS"

**EDITORIAL OFFICE:** MOWBRAY HOUSE, NORFOLK STREET, LONDON, W.C.

**PUBLISHING OFFICE:** 125, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

# THE VOICE OF BROWNING

by Peter Martland

David Trigg's splendid copy of THE REVIEW OF REVIEWS, opposite, landed on my doorstep the other day, and prompted in me a number of thoughts. My first thought was to see the picture itself for what it is, a palpable fake. Close examination shows that the heads have been stuck onto the bodies of the people listening to a phonograph. Now, that in itself did not rule out the possibility that these people did indeed gather together to listen to the voice of the dead poet Browning, as claimed in the caption below the picture:

*The above group represents a notable moment in the history of science and literature. The voice of the poet Browning, preserved by the phonograph, was being heard after death. It was the first occasion on which science had reproduced the actual voice of a dead man. "Every word," says Colonel Gouraud, "was perfectly distinct and of life-like fidelity."*

Some of Browning's cylinders survive to this day, and on one he actually forgets the lines of his own verses. What the picture signifies to me is the late Victorian obsession with death. Few can have missed seeing the Widow of Windsor in black, staring at a bust of her beloved Albert. What would she have done with a record of his voice ?

The set-up of the Browning picture is not unusual. A similar gathering took place, and was photographed, of friends listening to the voice of Cardinal John Henry Newman on the first anniversary of his death. If my memory serves me right, on that occasion both the phonograph and a bust of Newman were present in the picture. I wonder if, in 100 years' time, people will write about our strange obsessions in the same light as this 1892 article.

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## AN APPEAL FOR INFORMATION

Frank Andrews, Arthur Badrock, and Michael Kinnear are interested in three areas of British disc record production and marketing, and in need of details from any of the makes of record listed below. If you can help please send catalogue numbers only in the first instance, to those named alongside the three areas:

MICHAEL KINNEAR, [REDACTED] Nicole Records, Burlington Records, The Conqueror Record - Regent, Defiance Records, Elephone Records, Empire Records (unbreakables & acoustic), Millophone Record (NOT Millophone New Records), Pelican Records, Sovereign Records, Universal Records (unbreakable & acoustic), Whytesdale Records.

FRANK ANDREWS, [REDACTED] Apollo Green Label Records, Barberphone Records, Beattall Records, Bel Canto Records, Besttone Records, Britannic Records, Diploma Records (10" & 12" NOT 10½"), Famous Records, Invicta Records, John Bull Records, Kalliope, The Leader Record, Lyric

Records, Operaphone Records, Our Flag Records, Palladium Records, Pickofall Records, Pioneer Records, Sound Wave Records, Stella Records, Triumph Records, and Victory Records 10" and 12". Any records with lilac-coloured labels with no brand-name at all.

ARTHUR BADROCK, [REDACTED] Ariel Grand Records, Ariel Celebrity Records, Ariel Concert Records. Please state whether of 10", 10½", or 12" size.

These researchers will write back for any information they may need about those catalogue numbers you notify. Thank you.

## Archaic Recordings

Some notes by ROBERT PARKER on his address to  
The City of London Phonograph & Gramophone Society  
at their Symposium, Hatfield, 26th April 1987

### How are Archaic Recordings Supposed to Sound ?

Some of us believe that acoustical recordings may only be properly heard through acoustical reproduction equipment. Others prefer to listen through modern electrical equipment, and use signal processing techniques to overcome the shortcomings of the original recording processes. The basic difference between the two approaches would seem to be philosophical: the way in which the original recording is regarded - either as an entity in its own right - or merely as a stepping-stone between the listener and the original performance.

### Subjective Interpretation of Archaic Recordings

It is extremely difficult to find out exactly what are the shortcomings of early recording processes, as there are so many unknown variables: frequency responses; horn and diaphragm resonances in acoustical recordings; and cutter resonances and peaks in electrical recordings. It is therefore impossible to establish any reference standard for the modern replay of early sound recordings.

This situation is totally unlike that for early motion pictures, where all that is necessary to produce a passable representation of the original is to put up a white screen and project the picture at the correct speed, using whatever projection equipment is available, of any age or origin of manufacture. Sound reproducers, however, come in an incredible variety - particularly electrical reproducers - where no two pickups or loudspeaker systems sound alike. Listeners, therefore, become accustomed to the sound their "own" system and establish their

own standards of reference, which are of course highly subjective, and may have little relationship to the sound of the original performance.

What this means, in effect, is that we are all re-interpreting the original performances in the light of our own equipment and aural experience. Someone, for instance, who has grown up listening primarily to acoustical reproduction, may well develop a strong preference for the sound which is most familiar. This preference may bear little resemblance to the sort of sounds which would be heard at a live performance. We should always remember that all pre-tape sound recordings were originally live performances. It is to get back to the sense of that live performance that my own work is dedicated. I am re-interpreting the sound of archaic recording systems, to try and attain the feel of live performance that is accomplished in the best modern high fidelity recordings.

Why is it necessary to "Modernise" Archaic Recordings ?

A. To recapture a more realistic impression of the original performance.

B. To make historic recordings more appealing (and thus more accessible) to modern audiences. It should be remembered that a new generation has grown up for whom acoustical or monophonic 78 rpm recordings are completely foreign to their conception of how recordings ought to sound. Archaic recording processes squeezed the original performance into a point source; recordings were almost invariably carried out in acoustically dead studios, making it difficult for the listener to judge relative volumes and distances from the recording pickup-point (microphone/s or horn/s); frequency response was both uneven and severely restricted; and unacceptable levels of noise and distortion were superimposed over the audio signal.

C. Finally, I would like to make clear that what I am doing is in no way, and should in no way be regarded as, archival work. I am not trying to produce the definitive sound of a recording for future generations: I am trying to produce a modern sound for a modern audience. And I am making certain that all my original material is being maintained in original condition - untampered with - so that at a later date, someone else may do something else with it.

Whether or not it is judged successful, my work is at least dedicated to overcoming some of the obstacles to a wider enjoyment of great historic recordings. The reception to my "Jazz Classics in Digital Stereo" series on radio has been most encouraging, and has certainly aroused some controversy and, for the most part, healthy argument.

Robert Parker  
Vintage Productions Pty. Ltd.

Sydney 2001  
AUSTRALIA

# London Meetings

APRIL AND MAY 1987

After the glittering succession of eminent guest speakers to have visited us at the Bloomsbury Institute during the past few months, it was something of a comfort to be able to relax into informality and welcome back two of our regular stalwarts, one in April and one in May.

Geoff Edwards gave a programme on 21st April which struck a responsive chord among his listeners as he explored a nostalgic journey through his life, featuring records which he associated with particular events he had experienced. They were nicely presented, sometimes accompanied with a showing of contemporary leaflets, booklets, or record covers. I was particularly interested to see the "Band Wagon" records (BD 693) featuring Arthur Askey, Richard Murdoch, and Syd Walker, contained in their original triple record cover, specially printed, and now adorned with Richard Murdoch's autograph, gleaned by Geoff himself. There were many other echoes of all our yesterdays, and one which gave me a jolt of pleasure was to be reminded of those Saturday evenings when I would tune in to Jack Jackson's "Record Roundabout."

On 19th May it was the turn of Len Watts. Len had said it would not be a Pathé programme this time, but if anybody thought they would get away without hearing a few Pathés they should have known better. Len devised a programme under the title "Time", and took us around the clock, through 24 hours beginning with midnight and ending with the next midnight. Whether it represented a typical day in the life of Len Watts I find it hard to determine, but if it did I must make a note never to go and stay in his house. He seems to be a fearfully noisy chap in the small hours; bangs about joining in the dawn chorus, and greets the sunrise with cheerful abandon. What's more, he appears to get up to some very dubious pursuits late in the evening, about which the less said the better. All very enjoyable, though.

A. O. Leon-Hall

## FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

JULY 28th PRESIDENT'S NIGHT: George Frow will present an ABC programme All By Cylinders - And Being Called - "Arias, Ballads, Choruses". George's IDELIA Phonograph will be in use, playing some 27 cylinders if there is sufficient time.

7.00 p.m. at the Bloomsbury Institute

AUGUST 15th Frank Andrews presents  
THE HISTORY OF ZONOPHONE IN BRITAIN

6.30 p.m. at Neasden Public Library

# Bread and Butter Artists

THE TALKING MACHINE FARE OF 1907

by Frank Andrews

1907 was the halfway point between the freeing of the talking machine industry from the seemingly eternal wrangles over patents, and the outbreak of war in 1914. It is a useful point from which to view the industry, the repertoire issued by the competing companies in their monthly supplements, and the in-house recording artists whose names and noms-de-plume appear on the records we now so assiduously collect, analyse, and comment upon.

For the industry, 1907 was something of a watershed, although it was not apparent at the time. The cylinder trade had been highly successful until that time, when it began to show signs of running out of steam. In 1907 Pathé withdrew from the British cylinder market, and Columbia discontinued its cylinder branch of the trade. It was the year that the Russell Indestructible cylinder, based on Henry Seymour's process, came and went. It was the year the two-minute Clarion appeared. By the year ending, four companies competed for the cylinder trade: Edison, Edison Bell, Sterling, and Clarion. Indeed, in the seven years of peace which remained, only one other company was tempted into the declining trade in cylinders; the "Columbia Indestructible," later advertised as "Indestructible Phonographic Records." These cylinders, of both two and four-minute duration were distributed through John G. Murdoch Co. Ltd., of London.

The cylinder trade after 1907 became increasingly marginalised from the rest of the industry, requiring its customers to cope with changes from 2-minute wax cylinders and 4-minute wax Amberols, and then to indestructible Amberols. Technologically the cylinder maintained its head of steam but commercially the steam had gone out of it by the time war broke out in 1914.

Back in 1907 legislative changes consolidating, defining, and reconstructing patent law helped to resolve the rumbling battle over the double-sided disc between the International Talking Machine Co. m.o.H and Deutsche Grammophon A.G. Also, more companies were climbing on the disc bandwagon. Sovereign records made their appearance and departure that year. The following year Edison Bell demonstrated its new commitment to discs by issuing its first double sided discs. They were intended to give Edison Bell a competitive edge over erstwhile rivals Columbia and Pathé, both of whom were beginning to downgrade the importance of their cylinder business. Indeed, Pathé began 1907 with the first full year's production of their novel centre-start vertical-cut discs.

Clearly, disc recordings were the way forward, and the repertoires of the many disc companies in and beyond 1907 reflected this trend. However, let us consider from the vantage point of 1987 the purpose of sound recording in 1907. Was it, as many record collectors today feel, to capture for posterity performances of western civilisation's musical elite? Or was it for the more pragmatic purpose of providing pleasure and entertainment for those who could

afford the luxury of a talking machine and some records ? Perhaps we should not try to deceive ourselves. In the highly competitive world of 1907, with vast investments in plant and equipment and a sophisticated star system of artists, the entrepreneurs who guided the fortunes of the recording industry were principally concerned with maximising profits and dishing the competition.

Although modern collectors of great recordings see in their collections large quantities of records with a broad range of labels on them, the truth is that these records represented but a tiny fraction of the total output. They were quite untypical of overall production. Indeed, a glance at surviving business ledgers indicates that in 1907 many of the great artists' records were in fact heavily subsidised by the more humble fare which formed the bulk of the record-buying public's purchases.

Such was the pressure to maximise profits of some companies that artistic high culture was totally absent from their catalogues. For them, in 1907, music hall artists, brass bands, and instrumental records filled the catalogues. To the highbrow they were rubbish, but to the companies anxiously scanning sales and profits they were indeed "bread and butter," so much so that the bulk of companies in the years after 1907 were slow to capitalize on new musical trends - tangos, foxtrots, and, later, jazz, preferring the safety of "known markets."

The only company in the record industry to exist on a wholly classical repertoire was Fonotipia. We have, alas, no way of judging the profitability of this remarkable company, as its books have vanished. We can, however, speculate that the healthy profits of sister labels, Odeon and Jumbo, with their more populist fare, could well have propped up Fonotipia, particularly in lean years.

With the exception of Fonotipia, all the recording companies extant in 1907 issued monthly supplements illustrating current and newly released recordings. Generally the contents of these supplements varied little. To supply the new recordings, a small band of artists, which changed little over the years, trooped from studio to studio, pouring their talent onto the recording wax. Some of these artists remained loyal to one company only for discs and to another for cylinders. This reflected the belief current in 1907 that the two types of business were quite separate. Other artists (Billy Williams, the music hall artist being a good example) would do the rounds, appearing on the labels of numerous companies.

By 1907 an informal network of contacts had been established as recording experts got to know "recordable artists" whose records sold well. This network was not confined to singers and music hall artists: instrumentalists who recorded well also found their services in demand. The key to success for these artists lay less in their prowess in theatre and concert hall and more in their recordability on the crude acoustic recording machines. These "bread and butter" artists often recorded material which the original and often more talented performers failed to record because of their temperaments or the failure of their voices to record well.

Turning to the monthly record supplements themselves, what would the discerning record buyer in 1907 find within them ? The format was simple and used by all the companies who issued monthly supplements. The lists were

divided into groups, normally in the following manner: bands and "orchestras" playing marches and overtures; then singers performing the latest hits or past favourites. Novelty artists appeared next, followed by those creations of the recording studio, the "descriptive" record. (A favourite in 1907 was "Scenes at an aviation meeting"). Straight singers next, normally tenor, baritone, contralto, but perhaps also a bass and a soprano. These artists performed a wide range of vocal items: opera in English; oratorio; ballads; traditional songs; plus the latest concert and theatrical successes.

Following on from straight singers, either music-hall artists or their recording substitute, the "bread and butter" artist would be available performing the latest hits from the music-hall or musical comedy. The supplements concluded with smatterings of instrumentalists, vocal groups and, of course, monologues. The formulae for presenting new material from the recording studios must have been successful as it was never varied.

The most striking question we must pose is, who were these "bread and butter artists" ? The following list helps to answer this point. Ernest Pike, Harry Thornton, Alan Turner, Bernard Turner, Jessie Broughton, Wilfred Virgo, Harry Bluff, Billy Whitlock, Alexander Prince, Billy Williamson, Harry Lauder, Florrie Forde, and Mary Blythe. Few record collectors have sifted through piles of dusty recordings without turning up a selection of the records of these artists, using their own names or one of many noms-de plume.

Some artists performed for as many as five record companies or labels. Let us look at some of these artists and at their careers.

Ian Colquhoun: in 1907 a baritone with an established reputation in many recording studios. He was also well-known for his appearances at the London Alhambra in the long-running shows during the Boer War, when he sang "The Soldiers of the Queen." In 1907 you could find his records on the following labels: Columbia, Era, Imperial, Pathé, and Sovereign discs, and on Edison Bell cylinders. Colquhoun was a stayer, and his recording career extended into the electrical period, where his name is to be found on the records issued by the Crystalate Gramophone Record Manufacturing Company Ltd.

Edgar Coyle: also a baritone. At one stage of his career he was an exclusive Columbia artist and appeared on both their single-faced and double-faced records. However, prior to their exclusive use Coyle could also be found on 'Homophone', 'Neophone', and 'Sovereign' discs, and on the 'Russell Indestructible' cylinder.

Fred T. Daniels, a specialist in comic and laughing songs, could in 1907 be found on the labels of Beka Grand, Homophone, Odeon, and Sovereign discs, and Edison Bell cylinders.

Peter Dawson, the great Australian bass-baritone, began his recording career as early as 1904. By 1907 not only was he making records for a variety of companies, they were also published under a range of noms-de-plume, notably Hector Grant, and on the Zonophone label, George Welsh. Dawson (unfairly in my view) could be described as the longest surviving 'bread and butter' artist, recording for a further half-century. His later records were made exclusively for the

Gramophone Company. In 1907 this magnificent and intelligently-used voice could be found on Gramophone Monarch and Concert Records, Pathé disc, Sovereign and Zonophone discs. He was also to be found on the cylinders of Edison, Edison Bell, Sterling, and White.

The comic singer Harry Fay also recorded under the name Fred Vernon. He belonged to that group of artists able to perform the latest in popular song for many companies, either because the original singers were under contract, or because they were able to produce better performances in the recording studio. Fay had in his own right a considerable repertoire, much of which could be found in 1907 on Homophone, Neophone, Odeon and Pathé discs, and on Sterling cylinders.

A music-hall singer Arthur Gilbert also recorded comic songs. He used his own name and that of Arthur Osmand. A practical man, he quickly learned the skills of a recording engineer in the London studios of the National Phonograph Company, who made Edison cylinders. He subsequently became chief recorder for Beka records in London. His recorded art in 1907 could be obtained by purchasing Columbia single- and double-faced records, Neophone and Zonophone discs, and on Edison Bell and White cylinders. A contemporary of Fays was Alf Gordon, who was an experienced comedian and singer. He recorded using his own name and that of Will Terry, and could in 1907 be found on Columbia single- and double-faced records, Beka, Era, Favorite, Pathé, Sovereign and Zonophone discs, and Edison Bell cylinders.

The coon and comic singer Pete Hampton was another experienced studio performer. His efforts could be heard on Edison Bell cylinders, and on Era, Neophone, Pathé, and Sovereign discs. A favourite tenor of the day was Walter Hyde. He recorded for Edison, White, and Sterling cylinders, and also Odeon and Zonophone records.

A very popular artist who appeared in Britain on a variety of labels was Ada Jones. Although she lived in the USA she managed to get her work for six companies released here. Edison enthusiasts prized her records then and now. However, in 1907 she appeared as a predominantly disc-orientated artist with Columbia single- and double-faced records, Imperial, Star and Odeon discs claiming her talents.

Strangely, the most popular and prolific artist with the competing record companies, and a 'bread-and-butter' artist if ever there was one - the baritone Stanley Kirkby - released records on only four makes of record in 1907. These were Edison Bell and Clarion cylinders (Kirkby being a director and founder of the Company) Gramophone and Typewriter records, Gramophone Concert and Zonophone records. Kirkby's career continued beyond the introduction of electrical recording and he often performed in later years as a dance-band vocalist. He worked using his own name and a wide variety of pseudonyms, many still to be determined. However, we do know that in 1907 he appeared as Charles Lester, Frank Miller, and Walter Miller. Kirkby, the cousin of the opera and oratorio singer Kirkby Lunn - with the novelty of both fathers and both mothers being brothers and sisters - appeared successfully on the concert platform, in concert-party work, and in the music-hall.

Burt Shepherd, in 1907 an old record-making hand, first appeared on the

old Berliner discs. He sometimes recorded using the name Charles Foster, and was still a very popular artist in 1907. He appeared on Sterling cylinders, Gramophone Concert, Sovereign and Zonophone records, and Pathé discs. Another old hand in 1907 was the baritone Leo Stormont; all his recordings were on discs by this year, Columbia (both types) Era, Homophone, Pathé, and Sovereign.

Looking at non-vocal artists in the 1907 supplements we find the German, Albert Müller. He was billed by the Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd. as Albert Miller. Müller was the genius behind all those bells, tubaphone or xylophone solos, and was often labelled as "The German Billy Whitlock."

The Band of the French Republican Guard was in 1907 at the forefront of European concert bands. Their reputation had been consolidated by numerous concert tours around the Continent. They were considered to be a star attraction by the various companies with whom they recorded. Their 1907 releases were confined to disc records, and appeared on Beka, Favorite, Imperial, Odeon, Sovereign, and Zonophone labels.

I emphasise the word 'release' as it never followed that because a recording was issued in one particular year it was actually recorded in that year. One company in particular we discussed was Sovereign, whose brief appearance in the market-place coincided with the year we are discussing. Research indicates that many of their matrixes predate the year of issue.

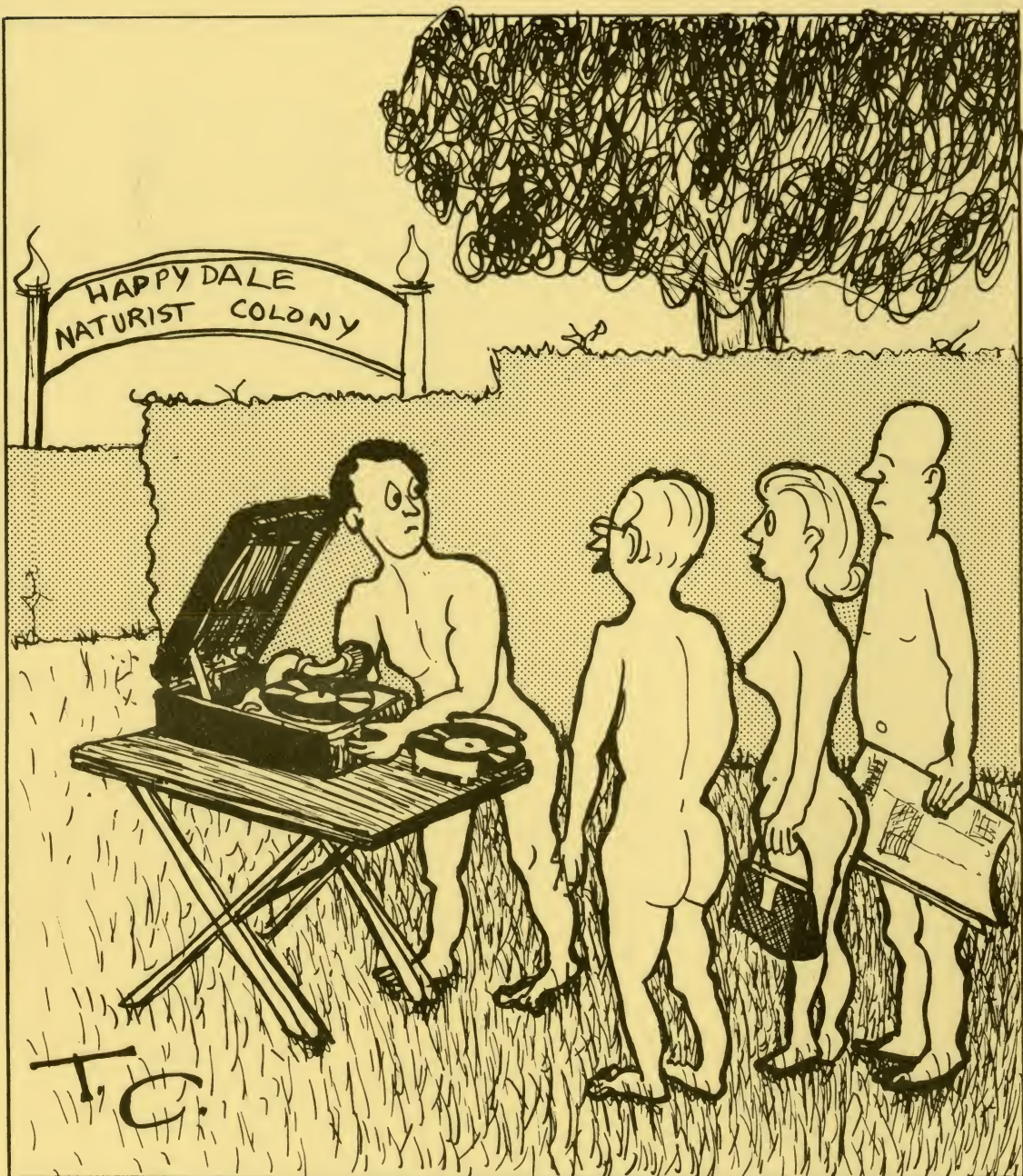
One sadly neglected group of performers today are band recordings. However, in 1907 they made up a large proportion of monthly issues and, apart from the operatic singers, only they attempted to provide serious music, albeit often in a truncated form, for that first generation of record buyers.

Most record companies had what could loosely be described as a musical director. He arranged, scored, hired, and conducted the "house-bands" and orchestras. These session men turned their hands to anything from the latest novelty piece to opera or bits of symphonies. House and session bands were augmented by regimental bands, private bands and orchestras whose names and fame were designed to attract the record-buying public.

At this time symphony orchestras and chamber ensembles were totally absent from the repertoires of the companies. The very versatility of that genre of music ensured its absence, for the limited dynamic range of the mechanical system of recording made it virtually impossible to make symphonic and chamber music records. Thus it cannot be said that these musical groups formed part of the "bread and butter" artists.

To sum up 1907, it was for the infant talking machine industry an interesting year, illustrating progress in the development and marketing of an acceptable repertoire for the growing record-buying public.

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"Look here, Foster, we all wish you'd be a bit more careful where you throw your used needles."